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**The Campaign  
Against Sweating**

*By*

**WALTER LIPPMANN**

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# The Campaign Against Sweating

By WALTER LIPPMANN

*"More than half the people employed in the factories and stores investigated in New York City get less than \$8.00 a week."—Dr. Howard Woolston, Director of Investigation for the New York State Factory Commission.*

IT is all very well to say of a woman that "she is working for her living," but ~~suppose she is working and not making her living.~~ What are you to say then? You can remark that you are indeed very sorry, and leave the matter there. Or you can say with more piety than wisdom that wages are determined by natural laws which man must let alone. Or you can insist that she is being sweated; that ~~a business which does not pay a living wage is not paying its labor costs; that such businesses are humanly insolvent, for in paying less than a living wage they are guilty of as bad business practice and far worse moral practice than if they were paying dividends out of assets.~~

Everyone knows what to think of a get-rich-quick concern which asks people to subscribe to its capital stock, and then uses the money invested

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to pay profits. We call it a fraud. When a railroad goes on paying dividends without charging up deterioration, people speak of it not as a fraud but as bad business. But when a mercantile establishment pays its labor less than labor can live on, it is combining the evils of the mismanaged railroad and the get-rich-quick concern. It is showing a profit it has not honorably earned, it is paying a dividend out of its vital assets, that is, out of the lives, the health, and the happiness of its employees. A business that exists on labor paid less than a living wage is not a business at all, for it is not paying its fixed charges. They are being paid either by the family of the woman worker, or by her friends, or by private charities, or by the girl herself in slow starvation.

There are few left to deny the truth of these general ideas. Even the people who are fighting minimum wage legislation have not attempted to deny that a self-respecting business should pay the full cost of its labor. Nor has any serious attempt been made to impugn the damning wage statistics revealed in one state after another and clinched by the Factory Investigation Commission in New York. We know now that thousands of women are below the line which the most moderate estimate can call a living wage. Knowing this fact, we know that something must be disastrously wrong; knowing it, we must act to remedy it if we can, and no intelligent person will say that we are meddling in what does not concern us. The spectacle of paper-box, shirt and candy manufacturers

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and department-store keepers living on the profits of a business that does not pay its employees a living wage is so absurd that we begin to wonder what are the serious arguments against minimum wage legislation.

Fortunately Mr. Rome G. Brown knows all the arguments, serious and otherwise. Mr. Brown, let it be said, is an attorney who has fought living wage legislation in various states, and is the author of the brief filed before the Supreme Court in the Oregon case. He is a kind of specialist in the business of finding fault with the minimum wage, and so no injustice can be done him or his cause by taking up the points he raises.

### What Mr. Brown Believes

Mr. Brown's latest utterance is dated February 10, 1915,<sup>1</sup> and it seems that Mr. Brown is no longer opposed to the minimum wage. He is opposed to the compulsory minimum wage, but he is for the ethical minimum wage. "Compulsion," says Mr. Brown, "stifles the humanitarian motive." Above all things Mr. Brown does not wish to stifle that. He does not say that six dollars a week is a good wage. What he says is that any attempt to force the employer to raise it would destroy the finer bloom of morality.

"His action ceases to be virtuous or moral when once you have enacted into a statute the precept of the Golden Rule, and when its observance is enforced under the threat of fine and imprisonment. Actions otherwise virtuous—of benevolence, of charity, of

<sup>1</sup> Annual Dinner of National Retail Dry Goods Association.



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neighborly love—are deprived of all elements of morality when performed under compulsion.”

And so, rather than take away from the act of raising wages all elements of morality, Mr. Brown would leave wages where they are. It is obviously high-minded of him, and exceedingly far-sighted. For here we see a leading attorney fighting step by step to preserve the quintessence of morality for employers toward that hypothetical time when they decide of their own free will to raise wages. At this historic moment, however, we are simply in the happy position of knowing that when employers abolish the starvation wage they will do so with unblemished ethical motives. There is indescribable comfort in the thought.

### Some More of Mr. Brown's Beliefs

I am a student of Mr. Brown's writings, and his Tolstoyan aversion to any kind of legal compulsion is not new to me. He wrote a book just about a year ago in which he attacked the Minnesota statute of 1913, and pointed out that the real trouble with it lay in the fact that the wage established was legal and compulsory. As a contrast he recommended the Massachusetts act of 1912. Under that law the Minimum Wage Commission may establish Wages Boards in particular industries. On the findings of these Boards the Commission may recommend a certain minimum wage, and publish its finding in the newspapers. There are no penalties for disregarding the recommendation, except those which public opinion creates. It is, in



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short, a use of "moral" force rather than of legal force. It is this Massachusetts model which we in New York are trying to follow.

Naturally we were happy to think that Mr. Brown approved our labors. The barbarous, immoral Oregonians and Minnesotans who wish to force these reforms by law had naturally to be fought, but Massachusetts and New York, where the elements of morality are still strong, would find a supporter in Mr. Brown.

"The Minimum Wage, by voluntary cooperation, including that of the states through non-compulsory statutes, is altogether, as it must be admitted, a logical workable measure."<sup>1</sup>

He was referring directly to the Massachusetts act.

"It adds to the efforts for amelioration by purely individual initiative, and by privately organized co-operation, the encouragement and assistance of investigations and recommendations made under official authority. It naturally results in bringing in line with the employers of more humanitarian tendencies those who, from avarice, neglect or indifference, would remain inactive without some such stimulating incentive."

So well pleased was Mr. Brown with these sentiments that he embodied them verbatim in the brief which he presented to the Supreme Court. Remember that this is the attorney who is engaged in attacking the Oregon minimum wage law, and think then what it means to have him hold up the Massachusetts act, and by implication the New

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<sup>1</sup> "The Minimum Wage," by Rome G. Brown, February 2, 1914.

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York one, as a model of righteousness. He says all that anyone would claim for the proposed statute in New York, and if Mr. Brown hadn't made a speech at the annual dinner of the National Retail Dry Goods Association on February 10, 1915, we should all have supposed that the chief opponent of the legal minimum wage law was an ardent supporter of the voluntary measure as applied in Massachusetts and proposed in New York.

But a few months have done much to Mr. Brown's spirit. His hatred of compulsion, his love of free morality, have deepened. Like Emma Goldman, he has come to fear not only the tyranny of law but the tyranny of public opinion. The Massachusetts statute he says now is "most obnoxiously compulsory." In that barbarous state, "when the wage is promulgated by the Commission, although there is no fine or imprisonment for the employer, if he fails to comply he is published through the state as an unreasonable recalcitrant." Mr. Brown only a few months ago described such laggard employers as men who from "avarice, neglect, or indifference would remain inactive without some such stimulating incentive." Now that New York is threatening to follow Massachusetts, Mr. Brown weeps publicly at the horror of compulsion from public opinion upon the avaricious, the negligent, and the indifferent. "Indeed the statute makes it a crime for any newspaper publisher to refuse this publicity to blacklist one who"—I thought Mr. Brown would say "who is avaricious."

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ricious, neglectful, or indifferent"; what he said was, "one who may be his own relative or his best paying advertiser—or even himself."<sup>1</sup> It seemed to me then that he was becoming a bit finicky in his objection to even the subtler forms of compulsion. Yet we dare not ignore Mr. Brown. He is the heavy artillery on the other side. So, leaving aside his contributions to morals as not altogether inspiring, we must proceed to consider him as an economist.

### "Wage-Worth"

"You cannot legislate efficiency," says Mr. Brown. "When you compel an employer to pay a wage which is fixed regardless of the worker's efficiency, you are legislating a forced gratuity to the worker, no matter that the wage be measured by the cost of living or by any other standard which disregards its fair worth." There you have in compact form the objection to a legal minimum wage which is most persistent in people's minds. They say to themselves, "How can you force an employer to pay a girl *more than she is worth?*" Isn't that against all business, common sense and the laws of economics? What right has the state to legislate charity into the pay envelope? Isn't it absolutely wrong to force any woman to *receive more wages than she earns?*

The answer is that it might be wrong if there were any way of telling how much she is worth, or what she earns. We know what women workers *receive*, but no one has the least idea whether

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<sup>1</sup> Speech at Annual Dinner of National Retail Dry Goods Association.

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their income has anything to do with their productivity or their efficiency. If there is one thing the Factory Investigating Commission made clear, it is that wages for unskilled women's work in the sweated trades are not based upon any recognizable standard of efficiency or value.

Dr. Howard Woolston, who directed the work of the New York State Factory Investigating Commission, has pointed this out:<sup>1</sup>

"Even for identical work in the same locality, striking differences in pay are found. In one wholesale candy factory in Manhattan no male laborer and no female hand-dipper is paid as much as \$8 a week, nor does any female packer receive as much as \$5.50. In another establishment of the same class in the same borough every male laborer gets \$8 or over; and more than half the female dippers and packers exceed the rates given in the former plant. Again, one large department store in Manhattan pays 86 per cent of its saleswomen \$10 or over; another pays 86 per cent of them less. When a representative paper-box manufacturer learned that cutters in neighboring factories receive as little as \$10 a week, he expressed surprise, because he always pays \$15 or more. This indicates that there is no well established standard of wages in certain trades. The amounts are fixed by individual bargain, and labor is 'worth' as much as the employer agrees to pay."

These figures show pretty clearly that two employees in the same district making the same kind of goods have no way of standardizing wages on any basis of value. That is why Mr. Brown, talking about wages depending upon "wage-worth," is using a catchy phrase and a neat theory which in

<sup>1</sup> The Survey, February 6, 1915.

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practice mean literally nothing at all. The kind of women's work to which the minimum wage would apply has no standard by which wages are fixed. Women get what they get, by the custom of the shop, by the whim of the superintendent, by arbitrary decision. No law of supply and demand, no sense of "wage-worth," determines that a "stripper" in order to earn fifteen cents an hour must paste paper on the side of about one hundred and fifty boxes, and a "hand-dipper" must coat about seven hundred and twenty pieces of cream candy with chocolate, while a hand-ironer in the laundry will earn twenty-five cents by pressing four plain shirts.

### Economic Bogeys

With these facts before us, suppose that we raised the wages of hand-dippers in candy manufacturing from fifteen to seventeen cents an hour, and thereby saved the girls from the most extreme hardships of poverty. By what standard would the Mr. Browns be able to say that we were paying this girl more than she is worth, that the extra cents were a "forced gratuity," or that we were interfering with the laws of supply and demand?

For what in the name of sanity are these economic laws as they appear in practical life? Mr. Brown and others talk about the value of cooperation, and how fine it is for employers to raise wages voluntarily. Yes, but why is it fine? Isn't it disastrous to tamper with the economic law, or are we to understand that the economic law has



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no terrors when violated by the good will of the employer? Or perhaps may we assume that economic law, as Mr. Brown uses the phrase, is nothing but the will of the employer?

I am forced to believe it. I am forced to conclude from much study of Mr. Brown that whatever happens to exist is "natural" and "according to law," that any change inaugurated by the workers or by public opinion is "artificial," but that any change created by employers is merely economic law working itself out to beneficent ends.

The phrase "economic law" on the lips of men like Mr. Brown is nothing more than sheer buncombe which conceals a prejudice. It belongs to the same grade of intelligence which says, "You cannot make water run up hill," in the face of the fact that you can make it run up to the top of the highest skyscraper; which says, "You musn't interfere with nature," and then proceeds to join oceans at Panama, deflect rivers, create lakes, move mountains, clear jungles, abolish typhoid, fly in the air, swim under the water, tunnel the earth. It is pathetic to think of what Mr. Brown's plight would be if millions of people hadn't spent their lives "interfering with nature." They have put clothes on his back, carried him in trains, protected him by fire laws, surrounded him with policemen; he has been shaved, washed, manicured; he has gone to the dentist's. He owes all that he is to invention, education, organization. The very liberty he talks about is a product of human effort, an effort to impose rational purposes upon the blind

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drift of things. When Mr. Brown is prepared to abolish all tariffs, all production of property, all factory laws, all laws against fraud, when he is ready to leave everything to whim and chance and accident, there will be some consistency in his thought.

### **The Incompetent Employer**

In the meantime he is wasting fine words. What he calls natural law is really an amazing and damnable inefficiency on the part of employers. In these trades where women are employed and sweated we are dealing not with inexorable laws but with thoughtless, stupid, careless, uneducated employers. Strangely enough, they are only too ready to describe the inefficiency of the girls they employ. Of course the girls are inefficient. What else can one expect from the present housing, schooling, and working conditions open to them? But for every score against the incompetence of the workers there is at least one score against the incompetence of the management, and it is time the general public realized that these manufacturers and retailers who will be affected by the minimum wage are proved by the facts to be profoundly incompetent business men. When they cry out against "interferences," those who know the facts laugh. Those employers who wish to be regarded as self-respecting captains of industry literally do not know how to run their own business, and far from the state's interfering with them by investigation, interference is more likely to prove their salvation.



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The New York Commissioners unearthed the most ludicrous inefficiency.<sup>1</sup> They found employers who kept their pay-rolls in pocket-memorandum books; employers who had no knowledge of rates paid by competitors for similar labor; employers whose rates varied as much as fifty per cent in the same neighborhood; whose labor cost varied as much as from seventeen per cent to thirty-nine per cent in the same line of work. They found seasonal fluctuations which were violent. They found that in eleven large retail stores in New York City 44,000 new names were added during the year and 42,000 names were dropped. This was to maintain an average working force of 27,000. In box and candy factories nineteen plants employed 3,400 persons to maintain a force of 1,700. The time lost between jobs is large. Of 1,500 women interviewed, 1,000 had lost an average of one month in the preceding year. Obviously the labor market in sweated industries is not a model of intelligence and foresight.

### Terrible Conclusions

If this welter of inefficiency is the product of "natural law," every civilized person will cry out for the interference of human law. It is "natural," no doubt, to slop along in the archaic manner, producing money profits at an enormous vital deficit. By the same token garbage would accumulate in backyards and alleys, and all manner of disease-breeding foulness litter the earth. It would be "natural" to leave it there, it is artificial to remove it.

<sup>1</sup> These figures are furnished by Dr. Woolston.

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But two terrible results are prophesied: 1, the minimum wage will drive men out of business; 2, it will raise prices. Mr. Brown uses both threats, though it is a little difficult to see how a business which had been extinguished could raise its prices. The idea is, I believe, that some firms will go to the wall, and that the remaining ones will recoup by raising prices. These fears are, as we shall see later, based on theoretical guesses, rather than actual probabilities. For the moment I wish to consider a third possibility based on the experience of the brush industry in Massachusetts. Brush making, it should be said, is the first industry in the country in which the minimum wage has been fixed by a wage board. Let me tell the incident in Mr. Rome G. Brown's own words:

"One brush concern, since the minimum wage for brush makers took effect, has discharged over one hundred of its unskilled employees and has reorganized its methods of work so that its less skilled labor is done by those who also perform more skilled work; and at a total wage which is \$40,000 a year less than that paid formerly."

In other words, the effect of the minimum wage has been to raise wages, eliminate a hundred of the most unskilled, and increase efficiency so much that the cost of labor is \$40,000 less than it was. One would think Mr. Brown might be led to confess that this particular firm of brush makers had been a pretty inefficient organization. Not Mr. Brown. He is not in the business of admitting inefficiency among employers. This firm of brush makers, he

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tells us, was not uneconomical; it was unselfish. And when the state brought its brutal hand down upon these sensitive brush makers the finer moral qualities disappeared:

"In self-defense against the arbitrary interference of the state with its business, it is now forced to figure its wage scales on a selfish basis. . . . "

The result is that it pays a higher wage and saves \$40,000 a year. But what some people may wish to know is whether this particular firm, in the old days when it was on its unselfish and inefficient basis, was applying those natural laws of economics about which Mr. Brown so graciously instructed the Supreme Court.

### Facts Against Forebodings

Let us assume that the Minimum Wage act is passed in New York. The Commission is created, and it proceeds to establish wages boards in four industries—paper boxes, candy, millinery, and retail dry goods. These boards, after investigating the cost of living and the existing wage scales, order a general raise of wages from a median of six dollars to eight dollars. Let us assume that these industries are not able to improve their efficiency, are not able to do what the firm of Massachusetts brush makers did. Let us assume that higher wages will mean no increased productivity among the women workers. Under these circumstances, what would the minimum wage cost the manufacturer in cutting down his profits, or the consumer in raising prices?

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Suppose that the whole cost is borne by the consumer. Then if work-shirts cost three dollars a dozen, and the labor of sewing them is paid sixty cents, when we raise wages ten per cent, the labor cost becomes sixty-six cents. The price instead of being three dollars becomes three dollars and six cents. In other words, while the worker receives a ten per cent increase, the consumer pays only a two per cent increase.

It is estimated that to raise the wages of 2,000 young women in New York candy factories from five dollars and seventy-five cents to eight dollars, confectioners in order to cover the cost would have to charge eighteen cents more per hundred pounds of candy. The profits in department stores average over five per cent on a year's business. But as the stock is turned five or six times annually, the yield on the investment is twenty-five per cent to thirty per cent. By raising the wages of girls under eighteen to six dollars, and of women over eighteen to nine dollars, the cost might be increased one and one-quarter per cent. If this were taken from profits instead of being added to the price, it would reduce the return to about nineteen per cent. The reason why these figures are so low is that the whole cost of labor in these sweated industries is a small fraction of the manufacturing cost. In the case of paper boxes, labor is a charge of from seventeen per cent to thirty per cent of the market price; in candy manufacture, the average labor cost is about thirteen per cent of the manufacturing expenses. By rais-

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ing that charge we raise the total cost very little.

### Hurting Business

In the face of all this, what becomes of the cry that we are proposing to ruin business? It takes its place, doesn't it, beside all the other exclamations which have accompanied factory laws since the beginning of the nineteenth century? It is the cry which has accompanied every effort to clean up working conditions, protect mines, guard the life of child and women workers. Employers are always threatening a migration to less civilized countries. Yet somehow they stay where they are. A few go. In Victoria, one manufacturer in a panic moved out before the law went into effect. He moved over to Tasmania. Then Tasmania adopted the same law. In Victoria when the law was first passed in 1896 there were 3,370 factories employing 40,814 people; after fifteen years' experience of the law there were 5,638 factories employing 88,694 people.

But suppose a few employers do move out of the state—say from New York to New Jersey. How long will New Jersey tolerate their production of pauperism, disease and degradation, and its costs in charities, hospitals and sanatoria? Just about as long as it takes New Jersey to realize the ridiculous social cost of sweating.

Yet we are told that some employers will go to the wall. Able neither to raise prices nor increase efficiency, they will fail. To them the community must reply with simple kindness that they belong



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with the landlords who own firetraps and conduct nests of disease and crime. They would better go out of business, and make way for better men.

### Pitying the Worker

It is often claimed that the minimum wage will become the maximum. President Wilson during his campaign gave an impetus to this argument by saying:

"If a minimum wage were established by law, the great majority of employers would take occasion to bring their wage scale as near as might be down to the level of the minimum; and it would be very awkward for the workingmen to resist that process successfully, because it would be dangerous to strike against the authority of the federal government."

Of course there is at the moment no question of a federal law. We are discussing state laws, and as regards New York a law which is to have no legal compulsion behind it. We are proposing to have a state commission of three persons select a small number of sweated industries where women and children are employed, and establish for those industries wages boards consisting of six representatives of the employer, six of the workmen, and two or three of the outside public. This conference of the trade is to study conditions and recommend a minimum wage, which is then to be published as an official recommendation. No one is legally bound by it. But even supposing he were, as in Oregon, California and elsewhere, how can the legal fixing of the least that may be paid af-

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fect the discussion of how much more shall be paid? If we make a rule that no one shall receive less than eight dollars a week, how does that prevent an employer from offering, or the workers from asking, nine or ten dollars? It is like assuming that because the tenement house law prescribes one hundred cubic feet of air per person, no one must live in more than one hundred feet.

But, say our critics, the tendency will be to level down to the minimum. Yes, but whom will it level down? Half the unskilled women workers will be levelled up. What ground is there for supposing the others will be levelled down? Are they, in the language of Mr. Brown, being paid more than they are "worth"? Or are they being paid what they are "worth"? Or aren't they being paid what the employer feels called upon to pay them? How will their status be changed by increasing the pay of the sweated workers?

Moreover, it is difficult to contemplate the folly of an employer who paid all his help, skilled, unskilled, experienced, and novice, anything like a single minimum standard. With no incentive left for improvement, no reward for skill, the efficiency of his plant would be a spectacle, and he would find very soon that he had been cutting off his nose to spite his face.

There is, however, no need to guess about these dark predictions. The minimum wage in one form or another has been applied for many years in various parts of the world. In Victoria it has been enforced by law since 1896, it has been applied in



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New Zealand, in England and elsewhere. In the United States the trade unions have in various trades applied it. For clearly there is no economic difference between a minimum established by force of law, by force of public opinion, or by force of a strike. The economic effect is the same, and all the terrible results prophesied ought to have shown themselves. It is, I believe, an almost unanimous conclusion of students that the minimum rates have not tended to become the maximum.

For example, according to Mr. Harris Weinstock of the United States Commission on Industrial Relations, 2,458 workers in the city of Auckland, New Zealand, had their wages fixed by law.<sup>1</sup> Among these 948 received the minimum, and 1,510, or sixty-one per cent, received more. In Christchurch, New Zealand, out of 2,788 under the wage law fifty-nine per cent received more than the minimum. In Dunedin, fifty-one per cent received above the legal minimum. To those, then, who assert that the effect is to level down wages, we can oppose the answer that where tried it has done no such thing.

Mr. M. B. Hammond, vice-chairman of the Industrial Commission of Ohio, from whom I quote these figures, says quite pertinently:

“Furthermore, it must be remembered that the employers’ claim that such a system of wage regulation would have a levelling effect on wages is beside the mark, since at the present time in most industrial establishments of any considerable size in this country, great numbers of employees performing the same class

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<sup>1</sup> The *Survey*, February 6, 1915. Article by M. B. Hammond vice-chairman Industrial Commission of Ohio.

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of work are paid the same wages, irrespective of differences in individual efficiency. A few years ago when I visited certain large steel mills in Pittsburgh I was told that in one of them where 12,000 workers were employed, two-thirds received a flat rate of \$1.50 a day, and in another mill employing 4,500 men, two-thirds of the employees received \$1.65 a day."

Indeed, our campaign against sweating is badly named a minimum wage campaign. The minimum wage exists, but it is so low and so irregular that it has become an infinitesimal wage. What we are struggling for is a minimum that shall be a living wage, a minimum which is yet so low that in all conscience it is little above the slave-owners' standard, a minimum which shall enable a woman who works all day long to earn enough to sustain her health, buy decent food, clothes and lodging, and secure a little recreation.

### The Fringe

There is one prediction persistently made by Mr. Brown and others which experience shows to be true. A certain number of the ultimately inefficient workers are displaced when the living wage standard is applied to an industry. The brush factory in Massachusetts which reorganized, saved \$40,000 on its wage bill, and discharged a hundred of its least skilled employees, is a case in point. There are undoubtedly people working to-day whom no business man would keep if they could not be sweated. Child labor is the most striking example, coolie labor is another; some immigrant labor, both

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men's and women's, falls within the category. There are also groups of workers who are physically or mentally defective, and there are those who have not yet learned the trade and so require an apprenticeship of some kind.

We are asked what is to become of these people? The question generally assumes that we have forgotten all about them, or that in our ruthless benevolence we plan to throw them out into the street. Yet as a matter of fact it is just these marginal workers who constitute the most convincing argument for establishing living wage standards. But they cannot be dealt with wholesale.

### Apprentices

In low-skilled occupations such as the sweated trades, no long period of apprenticeship is required. But there is a time when the young girl is so inexperienced that she wastes material and produces very little result. All sensible minimum wage laws provide for about six months' probation at something under the standard wage. There has been a tendency among employers to abuse this privilege. They have found it cheaper to take on "apprentices" for six months, discharge them, and recruit a new force of "inexperienced workers." They have generally worked this evasion of the spirit of the plan when the difference between the regular wage and the probationary wage was greater than the difference between the value of an inexperienced and an experienced employee.

Obviously these difficulties can be met by re-

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sourceful administration. An alert Commission can adjust its findings so as to eliminate gross circumvention, and still make perfectly feasible a term of apprenticeship. The deeper remedy for the situation lies in the school system which turns into industry workers with so little general training and vocational adaptability.

### Exceptional Cases

The plan we propose carries with it a provision for licenses to be granted by the Commission in special cases where the evidence is clear that a person should be permitted to work for less than the minimum wage. This elasticity is needed for good administration, because in any human problem there are particular people who fit badly into a general rule. There are, for example, a number of workers who are crippled in one way or another, and yet manage to live self-respecting lives by earning small sums. No one proposes to crush them under an iron rule, and so a human discretion is allowed to the Commission.

### Defectives and Incompetents

There are nevertheless classes of workers whose productivity is very, very low. They may be old, or weak-minded, or physically feeble, or so utterly untrained and illiterate that under American conditions they cannot be employed at a living wage. We say of them that they should not be employed. They should not be permitted to debauch the labor market, to wreck by their competition the standards of other workers.

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At this point we break radically with our critics. We are against sweating. That means we are against cheap labor and for the economy of high wages. We say that it is saner and in the end less costly to take care of these industrial incompetents than to allow them to compete with the great mass of the workers.

The sick and mentally defective should be cared for by the state. The old should be pensioned. The children should be kept in school, and subsidized to stay there if necessary. None of these people belong in the labor market, and the minimum wage if it keeps them out will do a most useful service.

### Immigration

Not enough has been made of the fact that the fixing of an American minimum is one of our best protections against indiscriminate and overstimulated immigration. Once abolish sweating and take industry off a basis of cheap labor, and you have reduced one of the great incentives to the most threatening forms of immigration. If the ~~European is compelled to work at not less than an American standard, he will be less useful to the employers of cheap labor, and less effort will be made to bring him over.~~

### Child Labor

The same reasoning applies to the employment of children. They are hired to-day because they are cheap. Make them expensive, and fewer of



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them will be hired; there will thus be less opposition to child labor laws. Indeed, by the transition from a sweated to a living standard there are few problems of industry which are not affected. Whenever business men abandon the old notion of all the traffic will bear and all the human body can stand, and turn to an intelligent counting of vital costs, a better morale appears in the industrial world.

### The Organization of Chaos

We are dealing in these sweated trades with industries where cooperation, pride of work, technical and social standards are most primitive. Competition has corrupted them to the point of despair, and only by the establishment of some device like the wages board can we hope to create a civilized discipline. The employers must organize to send their representatives; the workers must combine to send theirs. At these board meetings the conditions of the trade as a whole have to be analyzed, statistics have to be compiled, investigations made. Well-managed plants are compared with befuddled ones; the whole philosophy of management is opened to discussion. The educational effect of this will undoubtedly prove to be very great.

For what the minimum wage plan proposes is really a kind of legislature of the industry—a legislature in which workers, employers and public are represented. This is the Wages Board. Its findings are subject to veto or review by the Com-

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mission, or by the courts. But when the disagreement is not too radical, the Wages Board becomes in practice the actual parliament of the industry. Under the Oregon plan its decrees are enforced by the state, under the Massachusetts plan by public opinion.

Its powers, like that of any legislature, are limited. It establishes only the minimum wage. But this must carry with it agreement about hours, piece work, labor conditions, manufacturing methods, use of machinery, and, in the end, profits and prices too. In short, the Wages Board is a device for stimulating in sweated and primitive trades those beginnings of economic democracy which the unions are beginning to construct in the more mature industries. Ultimately this is perhaps the greatest promise of the experiment. The management of these chaotic trades will be scrutinized by the persons most closely concerned—the people who live and work in them. Employers will begin to know what they are at, how their methods compare with those of their rivals. They will learn the difficult and necessary art of thinking about the trade as a whole in its relation to labor and the public. The workers will for the first time get genuine representation, and they should learn by direct example the value of the solidarity of labor. They will receive constant practice in formulating their needs, exerting pressure, making intelligent their demands. And this, it should be remembered, is in industries where women predominate, women who will soon be voters. No more necessary or



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more valuable school of democracy can be created than these trade legislatures, in which people have a chance to learn how to govern the conditions of their work.

### Humble Pie

Yet it would be absurd to assume that minimum wage legislation is a kind of omnibus for paradise. To fix a "living standard" would be a great advance over what we have, but by every civilized criterion it is a grudging and miserable thing. In those moments of lucidity when we forget our hesitancy before brute obstruction, it seems like a kind of madness that we should have to argue and scrape in order that we may secure to millions of women enough income to "live." If we had not witnessed whole nations glowering at each other all winter from holes in the mud, it would be hard to believe that America with all its riches could still be primitive enough to grunt and protest at a living wage—a living wage, mind you; not a wage so its women can live well, not enough to make life a rich and welcome experience, but just enough to secure existence amid drudgery in grey boarding-houses and cheap restaurants.

We may fail to secure that. So far as the press is concerned, the issue hardly exists. It lies at the moment stifled in platitudes and half-truths about "not hurting business." From the little comment there is, we might think that a business was sound if it rested on the degradation of its labor; might think that business men were a lot of jumpy

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neurotics ready to shrivel up and burst into tears at a proposal to increase their wages bill a penny or two on the dollar; might think, from the exclamations of Mr. Brown and his friend John Smith, that a campaign against sweating would do no less than ruin the country.

But you cannot ruin a country by conserving its life. You can ruin a country only by stupidity, waste and greed.







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